Project: ‘Rupture in the capsular society’
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Introduction
This paper is part of a PhD-research project ‘Rupture in the Capsular Society’ at the Faculty of Architecture of Delft University of Technology. The project is focussed on the relation between architecture and users and more specifically on the spatial and physical features of dwelling-blocks that influence the way people use these spaces. The space between dwelling and street is approached as the designed link between people and the urban and social fabric. The hypothesis of this research is that this space plays an important role in the way dwellers, dwelling (as a verb) & dwellings are connected to the urban fabric.

In this paper the physical and spatial features of six contemporary Dutch intermediary spaces between dwellings and the neighbourhood will be explored.

The paper is divided in different chapters. The first one is about the theoretical background of the research. The second chapter focuses on the way the relation between people and space is approached. In the third chapter the focus of the research is explained. The subject of the fourth chapter of this paper is the method of the research. Design will be used as a research tool. In the fifth chapter the first results on the historical development of dwelling-blocks and the relation between architecture and urban-form in the Netherlands are presented. The sixth focuses on six contemporary dwelling-blocks in Amsterdam. In the last part of this paper some conclusions are explained.
context
There is a vivid discourse on the idea that cities have changed and have become dispersed and dynamic places. Cities have become an urban field, with no borders and no end. Several theories suggest that not only the structural and spatial conditions have changed, the cultural and social conditions have changed as well.

Like other countries in Europe in the Netherlands these theories are discussed in relation to urbanism and architecture. It seems Dutch society and the way people experience the built environment have changed. The increased mobility of people and the development of communication and information technologies changed the relation between people and their city. People are less bound to places than before, free to move and relate with the whole world.

And at the same time cities in the Netherlands develop itself more and more as a compilation of enclaves, functional and social different islands. People are moving from one homogeneous place to another. The structure of the city provides the conditions, this structure makes it possible for people to move between homogeneous places and avoid heterogeneous places.

The city becomes more dispersed and dynamic, becoming an urban field where heterotopic spaces become the norm, a compilation of homogeneous enclaves. Lieven De Cauter calls this a capsular civilization. This is a society of inclusion and exclusion, it is a dual society.

For several reasons the idea of the capsular society is the main focus of the research. First of all, the idea of the capsular society is part of the discourse on the changed cities and combines different theories. Secondly this theory has a strong link with space and architecture.

The capsular society is linked with the idea that the world becomes more complex everyday, our speed of movement has increased and we are bombed with information.

As Lieven De Cauter puts it: ‘...modern man is under constant attack by an overload of stimuli (shocks), which induce a sort of defence mechanism. ... the more physical and informational speed increases, the more man will need capsules.'

We perceive the world from inside ourselves. In a capsular society we need an extra boundary between our inside and the outside world. These boundaries can be called capsules. Capsule is a defence mechanism, excluding the dangerous outside world.

Lieven De Cauter explains the capsular society and links this with the network society. According to him we move through the network, but we live in capsules. Capsules are defence mechanisms, excluding the dangerous outside world, with a screen on which reality is represented. Reality becomes virtual and is simulated. We have stopped to experience difference, our society is a dual one of included and excluded people, but this duality stays hidden. Because we move through our own social network other social networks are invisible.
Another term De Cauter introduces is the capsular routine. The capsular routine is the smooth sequence one follows through the urban field, unaware of duality and difference. Dwellings, designed to make it possible to leave as fast as possible, entering the flexible networked world of homogeneous enclaves, support the capsular routine. These dwellings become capsules, mental and physical defence mechanisms from the world outside.

The capsular society might be a problem, a freeing condition, or a changed condition that asks for new solutions. The aim of the research is not to answer these questions, but to find out if this capsular society can be recognized in the Dutch built environment and if these conditions are influenced by physical and spatial features.

If spaces influence (hinder or support) social conditions, knowing how means ‘to design’ can become a critical or even political act. Knowing what spatial and physical features influence encapsulated life-styles, and in what way, could make designers more conscious about their designs.
**space + people**

It is important to perceive the city as something more than just a physical form, because if we do not we will not be able to understand how the city really works, what the city means for people and how they use it. As Peter Marcuse puts it: ‘...ignoring the dimension of time and the layering of social uses leads to a fetishization of the built environment, of the city as a physical form, which supports a rigid, one-dimensional view of the city...’.  

Looking at the layering of social uses can show us the way different social groups use the city and where different people use the same locations or where they do not. Time is important because the city is a dynamic place. Places like business areas can be very busy during daytime and completely abandoned at night.

But this does not mean we need to forget the physical form of the city. Space provides conditions, creates possibilities. ‘By giving shape and form to our material world, architecture structures the system of space in which we live and move. In that it does so, it has a direct relation ... to social life, since it provides the material preconditions for the patterns of movement, encounter and avoidance which are the material realization –as well as sometimes the generator- of social relations.’

Many researchers work on this idea, the interrelation between space and people, but most of them focus on the urban scale and social networks, not on space and especially not on architecture (like S. Read, M. Hajer, A. Reijndorp, R. Sennett, M. Castells).

The relation between people and spaces can be predictable, it is possible to create spaces that force people into a certain behaviour, like a prison. But creating liveable spaces means creating conditions and possibilities that let new usage and unpredictable usage emerge. Architecture should provide conditions, expand possible uses, and not constrain people.

This makes architectural research difficult, this kind of research is about possibilities and providing conditions, and not about how certain spaces let a certain predictable behaviour emerge. Therefore the research focuses on one hand on the existing built environment (contemporary and historically) and on the other on the exploration of (other) possibilities.
Focussing on spatial features that might influence the encapsulated features peoples life’s means you have to know how certain spatial/physical features support or hinder the capsular society.

A capsular society is a controlled society, filled with expected events and smooth movement, with no room for surprise and difference. Challenging the capsular society therefore means creating moments of surprise, excitement, creating ruptures in the controlled capsules.

Kurokawa, an architect who wrote the ‘Capsule Declaration’ in the seventies, writes: ‘A rupture in the capsule, however small, would instantly upset the internal equilibrium and destroy the strictly controlled environment in it.’

A rupture in a capsular society creates space for the unexpected, creating space for the uncontrolled.

According to Loos in 1910, creating ruptures is not the task of an architect: ‘The house has to please everyone, contrary to the work of art, which does not. The work of art is a private matter for the artist. The house is not. The work of art is brought into the world without there being need for it. The house satisfies a requirement. The work of art is responsible to none; the house is responsible to everyone. The work of art wants to draw people out of their state of comfort. The house has to serve comfort. The work of art is revolutionary, the house conservative. The work of art shows people directions and thinks of the future. The house thinks of the present. Man loves everything that satisfies comfort. He hates everything that wants to draw him out of his acquired and secured position and that disturbs him. Thus he loves the house and hates the art.’

But maybe, in a capsular society this is exactly the task of an architect, creating ruptures. Because we need to question ourselves, like Tabor writes: ‘Every home needs windows,…, into the world …Everybody needs to keep an eye, a window, on the world to reassure the self that differs from the world and thus to reinforce the self’s identity.’

And we need to be confronted with the co-presence of others, as Hajer and Reijndorp explain: ‘Confrontation with other opinions makes us develop our own ideas. …The concrete and physical experience of the presence of others, other cultural expressions, confrontation of different meanings of the same physical space, is important for the development of our own opinion and collecting information about the society we live in.’

How can we relate to the world, reinforce our identities, collect information, when duality and difference stays invisible?
**focus**
The capsular routine, explained before, makes it possible for people to move comfortably from one place to the other, a completely expected and smooth event. The space between dwelling and street might support this capsular routine, or create space for unexpected activities (rupture).

The research focuses on dwelling-blocks, in order to explore the designed intermediary space between the individual and the collective, private and public, dwelling and street. How the physical and spatial features of this space support or hinder reciprocity, interaction, inclusion or exclusion. It is about the communication between inside and outside, interior and exterior, public and private (design and place) on one hand and exclusion, control, boundaries and thresholds (design and defence) on the other.

3 elements: Block, dwellings, intermediary space:

The intermediary space, the physical boundary between block and street, the physical boundary between dwelling and intermediary space and the physical boundary between dwelling and street are all mediators and boundaries, communicating and excluding at the same time.

The four levels of the research are:
1. the relation between urban form and architecture (block and street),
2. space between dwelling and building (intermediary space)
3. the dwelling
4. sequence through these levels
Method

This research design will be used as research tool, exploring spatial and physical features of dwelling-blocks. Parallel to that the way people use these spaces will be explored.

How design can be used as research tool is explored by Prof. dr.ir. T.M. de Jong, he has come up with a four different approaches of using design as a research tool. His list is not conclusive, but useful because he differs in the determination and variability of object and context.

The research will contain those four approaches:

1. Critical drawing and modelling of different intermediary spaces is the first part of the research. At the same time I want to observe the way people use this space. How are these spaces used and what are the spatial and physical features of these spaces (design research).

2. The next step will be design study: Using the analysed and observed spaces in order to create new solutions and thereby question the existing ones. Combining the results in matrixes will become a kind of typological research, with the intention to create schemes useful for other designers and architects.

3. Finally there might be possibilities that are not analysed or designed yet. Study by design will be used to explore other possible and desirable solutions.

This paper only shows the comparison of six contemporary projects and two important shifts in the historical development of dwelling-blocks in the Netherlands.
The historical development of the city-block in the Netherlands shows two important shifts that changed the relation between street and dwelling and changed the role of the intermediary space. These shifts are of interest because they caused more distance between the dwelling and the street. The first shift created more space inside buildings, between dwellings and the entrance of the buildings (1866) and the second one created more space at the street-side of the buildings (1934).

In the second half of the 19th century, around the time the urban planner Van Niftink planned the first part of the quarter ‘de Pijp’ in Amsterdam the first alteration of the space between dwelling and street can be detected. Before this moment parcels were occupied by one dwelling, but because staircases were built as independent objects inside the buildings it became possible to create more dwellings in one building. This meant a collective space was created between the front door of dwellings and the moment one entered the street.

The next shift, important for this research happened after the ‘Plan-Zuid’ of Berlage in Amsterdam South in 1917. Berlage developed a plan for Amsterdam South where the architecture supported the urban form, the architecture was used to create a unity in the urban experience. The buildings shaped the city.

After this dwellings where seen as more important than the urban form, the primary task of the buildings was no longer the division between public and private spaces. For the planners of the AUP (general development plan, 1934 until about 1960) dwellings where the most important elements of these plans, no urban form or idea should influence the perfect orientation of the dwellings. In these plans the distance between the moment one left the building to the street increased. This was the second shift altering the relation between dwelling and street. 13,14,15

This is not intended to be a conclusive story on the historical development of the Dutch city-block. It is a short sketch on some of the alterations that took place, showing the increased distance between dwelling and street, probably influencing the relation between people and street.
projects
The six projects presented in this paper are all projects in Amsterdam. Three of them are developed in existing urban structures and three of them in new developed urban areas.

3 projects in existing urban structures:
- Silodam of MVRDV, built in 2002, 157 dwellings
- Henkenshage of Thijs Asselbergs, built in 2000, 77 dwellings
- Osdorp Europan if Arons en Gelauff arch., built in 2002, 112 dwellings

3 projects in new developed urban areas:
- Java island of S. Soeters, built in 1996, 220 dwellings
- Piraeus of H.Kollhoff, built in 2002, 300 dwellings
- The Whale of Architecten Cie, built in 2002, 214 dwellings

In this chapter the different intermediary spaces and the different relations between the blocks and urban form will be shown. The schematic drawings are sections and plans, the blocks are grey, green is the intermediary space and red is the boundary between public and private.

Silodam of MVRDV, built in 2002, 157 dwellings (p.12)
This block is built in the old harbour of Amsterdam, next to the quay, the building stands in the water.
There is a clear boundary between public and private. The architects call the building an compilation of mini-neighbourhoods, these 'neighbourhoods' are all internal, intermediary spaces inside the block.
Between block and quay there is a designed intermediary space, literally connecting block and quay.
There is a public route trough the building, this route ends at a public terrace. Because the quay and the terrace are both death ends, though this space is public, people need a reason to go there.

Henkenshage of Thijs Asselbergs, built in 2000, 77 dwellings (p.12)
This block is built in an area that is developed after World War II.
There is a clear boundary between public and private, but this boundary does not coincide with the block.
Between block and street there is a designed intermediary space, literally connecting block and street.
There is a public route trough the block, this route connects one side of the block with the other.
The internal court is located on the second floor, under the court cars are parked. Though the internal court does not have a direct relation with the public space around the block, there is a visual connection because of the public route through the block.

Osdorp Europan if Arons en Gelauff arch., built in 2002, 112 dwellings (p.13)
This block is built in an area that is developed after World War II.
There is a clear boundary between public and private and this boundary does coincide with the block.
The internal court is located on the third floor, on the first two floors cars are parked. The intermediary space (the internal court) is completely detached from the area around the block.

Java island of S. Soeters, built in 1996, 220 dwellings (p.13)
This block is built in the newly developed harbour of Amsterdam. Different parts of the block are developed by different architects and therefore consists of different buildings.
There is a clear boundary between public and private, but this boundary does not coincide with the block.
There is a public route trough the block, this route is a street for pedestrians and cyclists through the whole area.
The internal court is public, though around this public space there are clearly detached outside spaces for the dwellers.

Piraeus of H.Kollhoff, built in 2002, 300 dwellings (p.14)
This block is built in the newly developed harbour of Amsterdam.
There is a clear boundary between public and private this boundary does coincide with the block.
The form of the block relates with the public space. There is a public route through the block, the block is folded around this route and keeps the public route 'outside'.
The intermediary space is located inside the block, there is no direct relation between this space and public space, only visually.

The Whale of Architecten Cie, built in 2002, 214 dwellings (p.14)
This block is built in the newly developed harbour of Amsterdam.
There is a clear boundary between public and private this boundary does coincide with the block.
The form of the block relates with the public space. There are two public routes under the block.
The intermediary space is located inside the block, there is a strong relation between this space and the public routes. The intermediary space becomes visually almost public.
Comparison
The scale of the block of Soeters, the fact that the block is developed by dif-
ferent architects (therefore consists of different buildings), the public route
through the block and the explicit public function of the internal court divide
the block. The block collapses into different buildings and spaces. All the other
elements are unitary objects.
The project on Java island and Henkenshage have the most complicated re-
lationship between the intermediary space and the public space, because of the
routes moving through the blocks.
The public routes of Silodam, Piaueus and The Whale are formal routes, the
boundary between public and private stays clear and hard.
The project in Osdorp is the most detached of the urban fabric around the
project, with a clear boundary between public and private and only internal
and detached intermediary spaces.
The dwellers of the project in Osdorp, Silodam, The Whale and Piraeus all
have their own internal world of intermediary spaces between their dwelling
and the facade.
'Attaching dwellings to places through the design of intermediary spaces'
'Attaching dwellings to places through the design of intermediary spaces.'
'Attaching dwellings to places through the design of intermediary spaces.'
Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is not a complete answer on the question how space supports or hinders an encapsulated lifestyle. Though one of the conclusions might be that, of the compared projects, the project in Osdorp is the most capsular. Still the question remains if we can recognize the capsular society in the Dutch built environment. A building like the one in Osdorp suggests we might. And the interiorized intermediary spaces of Silodam, Piraeus and The Whale strengthens this idea.

We need our capsules, to defend ourselves and to feel free. This brings us to an interesting paradox of the research. Boundaries both include and exclude, connect and detach at the same time. Boundaries mean interaction and exclusion, that makes them complex and twofold.

The call for safety and defence mechanisms might not be surprising in a world where we feel bombed with information. Going back to the quote of Loos, maybe we need to design comfort, comfortable capsules. Design what people want. In a capsular society everything is about control, comfort and creating happiness, serving people, because everyone deserves to be happy.

Maybe Loos, in his time could call for the creation of comfortable dwellings, comfortable places, places to rest from the hectic world outside. But, if a society becomes capsular, all exterior places become interiorized, comfort and control surround us everywhere. What we need might be something else, something to remind us that we are here to live our life, not to save and protect it.

We move through the average general mediocre controlled sameness, from one place the other. Our experiences are expected and surprises are arranged. And when we die, we are save, bored to death in a world that never provided any conditions to live.
1 Attaching dwellings to places through the design of intermediate spaces

References


3 In the lecture of Foucault ‘About other spaces’ he explains his term heterotopia. Heterotopias can be seen as contra-places. These spaces or moments are real, moments or places where all other places are represented, contested and turned around. Foucault, M. (1967). About other spaces. Dat is architectuur sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw (2001). H. Heynen. Rotterdam, Uitgeverij 010: 391-395.


